

Royal Botanic Gardens Kew

Inspiring futures

Alex Antonelli



Tell us about your job

I'm Director of Science at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. My main roles are to make sure that we're doing the best possible and most relevant research at Kew Gardens and Wakehurst; that we communicate our findings in an accessible and engaging way; and that we take excellent care of our amazing collections of plants and fungi from around the world and continue improving them for future generations.

Why is science important in your career?

Science is what gives me personal and professional motivation – it's simply the nicest thing on Earth if you ask me! It's a fantastic feeling to discover something new, that no one has ever found or fully realised before. Every little step towards new knowledge, and new applications for previous knowledge, is what moves our societies forward.

What is your average work day like?

I have several meetings, making sure things are running smoothly and dealing with any issues. I also get the chance to meet people from many parts of society and from many countries. Several tasks are also best done behind the computer, such as writing reports, scientific papers, and providing feedback on various projects. It's a very varied and intellectually rewarding job.

Did you go to university? If so, what did you study? If not, what did you do after leaving school?

It feels like I've spent most of my life at universities! I studied biology in my home country, Brazil, and then studied botany, systematics and evolution in Sweden and Switzerland. I also worked at Harvard for a while.

What sort of personality traits do you have that help you in your career?

I'm generally a very open person, and I'm always curious to meet people and listen to their ideas, work, and aspirations. I'm also constantly trying to see the potential (rather than the hinderances) in everything, and I'm very optimistic that things can just get better if we work in the right way and share clear directions.

What helped you get your role at Kew?

I believe it was the combination of having worked on many different topics relevant to Kew: from doing a lot of fieldwork collecting plants, to working in the lab with modern DNA techniques, supervising many students, designing innovative research projects, and developing research environments of high quality and international recognition.

What advice would you give to someone considering a career like yours?

Never stop being curious and follow your interests! There are people who mostly see problems and difficulties with a career in science. But if you truly care about something, and invest your mind and energy into it, you can really make it happen! It's often more about hard work and dedication than talent.

What do you want people to know about your work?

We have very exciting times ahead! I'll be doing my very best to help Kew further develop as a world-leading centre for research, collections, training and outreach in plant and fungal sciences.

We can't do *everything* – we therefore always need to identify where our potential is highest and invest in it. Quality is always preferable to quantity.

The loss of biodiversity is arguably the single largest threat to our planet and our own future. We can reverse this trend, but this requires proper knowledge, concerted efforts, and targeted investments. Kew can make a real contribution.

Want a career that grows?

Build your skills in science, technology, engineering, art and maths to give yourself a chance to blossom in a career like one of these varied and exciting jobs at Kew.

You could make a real difference to the world.

For further information: www.kew.org